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# Italian Probe Claims Bulgarians Behind Attack on Pope

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ROME—Italian magistrates investigating the attempt to kill Pope John Paul II in 1981 have uncovered a mass of largely circumstantial evidence that they plan to use in court to show that Bulgaria's secret service masterminded a plot to assassinate the pontiff.

In a 77-page report that concludes that the aim of the conspiracy was to put down social upheavals in the pope's native Poland, the Italian state prosecutor acknowledges that some of the evidence is contradictory and that his case is dependent on the credibility of Mehmet Ali Agca, the 23-year-old Turk convicted of shooting the pope on May 13, 1981.

But as a result of the painstaking investigation, which took two years to complete and was conducted in at least eight countries, the prosecutor has now formally requested the indictment and trial of five Turks and three Bulgarians.

A quite different interpretation has been put on the 25,000 pages of evidence in possession of Italian magistrates by lawyers representing Sergei I. Antonov, the only Bulgarian defendant who is in custody in Italy. While privately conceding that the case is likely to go to trial—probably late this year—they continue to insist that their client will ultimately be found innocent and they profess to find "positive points" in the prosecutor's report.

Initial accounts of the still-secret report have omitted

much of the circumstantial evidence that could undermine rather than confirm the conspiracy theory and did not take note of the prosecutor's acknowledgement that Agca now says that he obtained from publicly available sources such as a telephone book at least some of the information about the Bulgarians he implicated.

A trial that would directly accuse Bulgarian officials and raise questions about Soviet involvement in the assassination plot at a time of heightened Soviet-U.S. hostility would have enormous political and diplomatic repercussions. Bulgaria has repeatedly denounced the investigation as having been inspired by the Central Intelligence Agency, which paradoxically has come under strong attack from conservatives in the United States for

not doing more to confirm and publicize the Soviet Bloc's alleged involvement in the case.

The Washington Post has conducted its own inquiry into the evidence and the arguments being marshaled by the prosecution and defense in preparation for what would certainly be one of the most sensational international trials ever held. The key points to emerge from interviews with lawyers and investigators in the case, as well as from portions of the prosecutor's report that have not been previously published, include:

- While acknowledging that there are reasons to doubt the contradictory confessions and retractions made by Agca while in prison, the prosecutors have concluded

that the weight of the information they have gathered supports Agca's story that he was promised more than \$400,000 by the Bulgarian secret service to shoot the pope.

- Italian investigators say they have confirmed sections of Agca's testimony about the three Bulgarian defendants, including details about their personal and professional lives, facial characteristics, apartment layouts, and home and office telephone numbers. Some other parts, they say, are "unverifiable."

- Agca's description of an escape plan, under which he and an accomplice were to have been smuggled out of Italy in a diplomatically protected vehicle, is lent plausibility by the fact that a sealed truck was on Bulgarian Embassy grounds at the time of the assassination attempt and left for Sofia shortly afterwards. According to the state prosecutor, the embassy requested a special customs procedure for clearing the truck that has not been used since.

- Agca's credibility as a witness is open to serious challenge by the defense following his retractions of important chunks of testimony including allegations about a plot to kill Lech Walesa, leader of Poland's now-banned Solidarity trade union. Last June 28, according to the state prosecutor, Agca withdrew a long series of claims about visiting Antonov's apartment and office in Rome and meeting his wife, Rosicza.

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